3t Mukherjea O, Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42



### *Supreme Court of the Santals*

224 634 692 [196] According to immemorial custom, the Santals join together in an annual hunt (*Lò bir sendra*) on the conclusion of the spring flower-festival, when opportunity is taken to discuss various questions affecting the social and religious problems of the tribe, and to decide the reference cases from the decisions of the *Desh-Pròdhans*.

Here grave social offences, necessitating social excommunication and ostracism (*Bitlàhà*), (as we shall see in detail very soon) constitute subjects of grave deliberation by the tribe. Such meetings are [211] convened by the circulation of a mysterious notice [184] by means of a knot tied to a rope as in Mayurbhanj, [202] or a branch of *Sal* tree carried from *hat* (market) to *hat* (as in Santal Parganas). About the constitution [114] of this privy-council, Dr. Campbell opines that a person, *Dihri* (the superintendent of the hunt), is also the president of the court which assembles in the evening, but all that our enquiries revealed in Mayurbhanj was that the Pargana, the Desh-Pròdhans of the tribe assisted by the elders called Desh-Panchayet, jointly deliberate together before declaring their verdict.

[184] [178] This ancient institution, called in Santal lore *Sendra bir bichar* (a trial during a hunt at a forest) is almost extinct in Mayurbhanj, as wild games are protected by the State and no question of a tribal hunt

3t Mukherjea O, Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42
SANTAL PARGANAS



decided. The penalty for non-observance of this law is that they would be socially ostracised themselves.

The venue of the final trial rests on the tribal chiefs and various other officials of the tribe who assemble together during their general hunting season in the month of Santal *Pata Cando* (swinging festival known as Còrò̀k) At this big Santal assembly, the case is reopened and the parties are asked to adduce evidence in support of their case. If, however, the accused pleads guilty, there is an end of the matter, and he or she, as the case may be, is fined or ostracised. If the fine is not paid within the date fixed, ostracism takes place in lieu of fine.

When the parties are found guilty by the assembly, the Headman, who took cognisance of the offence initially, gets his credit, but if the evidence shows that the accused persons are not guilty, he is himself seriously punished.

When a verdict of guilt is passed, a general decree of excommunication is issued and a date is fixed for the ceremony. The date and place of *Bi̱lahà* is communicated through the entire tribe by means of a branch of a *Sal*-tree conveyed on the shoulders of a Santal from one village to another, from one market-place to another; outside their pale few know the significance of this mysterious notice.

3: Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42
MAYURBHANJ



224 was a regular feature in old times but now it is organised more or less for the relaxation of state guests or when a wild animal troubles the people.

*Deshua Sendra (Disom Gipitic' Sendra)*[1].

[634] The date of this annual hunt is fixed by the Parganas of the hilly areas where the tribal excursion is made in the month of *Chaitra* or *Baisakh* (April—May). The information is sent round by means of
224 a knotted string called *Girà gaṭh* conveyed by the
202 Santals.
211

The *modus operandi* of this information may be thus explained. Supposing a string with fifteen knots reaches the village X, the villagers will unloose a knot. When it reaches the village Y, it means that fourteen days remain for the hunt taking place. The messenger carrying the notice is changed there and another takes his place. It is his duty to inform the place of *Gipitic'*, e.g. where the tribe would rest after the hunt.

224 The preliminaries regarding which portions of
782 the jungle would be beaten by the people of parti-
[634] cular *mouzas* (areas) being fixed by the Parganas in
[793] consultation with the tribe, the *Dihri* of the area offers pujas to the presiding deity of the hill.

[178] 1 This hunt has been stopped since 1916 when a
[579] mêlée took place in Mayurbhanj, so the information sent
[211] round by a string full of knots cannot now be legally circulated.

31 Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
AW42 Santal AW42
MAYURBHANJ



offers pujas to the presiding deity of the hill. Vermilion and red fowls are offered to the gods together with sun-dried rice and incense. As the fowls are sacrificed, the blood is poured on the sun-dried rice and offered to the other gods of the locality in their names. The head of the fowl lies on the ground and the body is kept for the meal of the *Dihri*. Next the *Dihri* salutes the deity by prostrating himself fully on the ground and thus invokes him:—

We are hunting in this jungle.
Let the hunting be safe.
Let us hunt in plenty.
Let not lions and tigers kill us.
Let no serpent bite us.

Now the news is conveyed by blowing a horn called *Sakwa* made of the horn of a *Gayal* (a species of ox, *Bos frontalis*). All men begin beating the jungle. The hunting goes on as musical instruments like the *Nagera*, *dhak*, *dhor* (small drum), *jharli* (a bell), cymbal are played upon by a band of musicians. The *Nagera* sounds "dubuń, dubuń, dubuń" but when the animals approach with a swift motion, it is changed to "dhibi, dhibi, dhibi." All men become aware of the advancing games. Starting approximately at 10 A.M., the hunt continues upto sunset, with bows and arrows, *tangis*, swords, *kapi* and *borolam* as weapons.